

MINORITY REPORT.

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There was a time in my life when I attended any event that featured Henry Kissinger as a speaker. The man—whose greatest single achievement is to have got everybody to call him Doctor—was a puzzle to me. Everything he touched turned to nightmare, yet people seemed to want to touch *him*. I lounged at the back of numerous black-tie dinners and corporate galas, listening to the elderly rubbish that he talked and looking for a sign. In the end I discovered the theme, or gimmick, of these gruesome soirees. There always came a point when Kissinger would hint, heavily and darkly, that he knew more than he could say. This hint usually took the form of a reference to some raw exercise of power and violence. So that was it: Kissinger liked the sensation of provoking nervous laughter, and certain audiences enjoyed the *frisson* of complicity that came with it.

I was thus able to start boycotting such events with a clear conscience, reasonably confident that I had seen through the card trick. But I sometimes wondered, If he's like that in public, what can he be like behind closed doors? A recently leaked memorandum contains a clue. Headed "Confidential" and written on the letterhead of the law firm Kaye, Scholer, Fierman, Hays and Handler, it is signed by Julius Berman. Berman is a former chair of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, perhaps the most pompously titled organization in the United States. He recounts the detail of a "private, off-the-record breakfast meeting" held on January 31, at which Kissinger and Jewish leaders discussed the crisis in the territories occupied by Israel. The fourth paragraph conveys what might be called the flavor of the breakfast. Kissinger told his hosts:

Israel should bar the media from entry into the territories involved in the present demonstrations, accept the short-term criticism of the press for such conduct, and put down the insurrection as quickly as possible—overwhelmingly, brutally and rapidly.

"Overwhelmingly, brutally and rapidly." With what relish Kissinger must have employed those terms. And with what a sick, vicarious thrill his civilian listeners must have admired the purity of his *Realpolitik*, the ruthlessness of his logic.

There was some minor embarrassment at this disclosure, all of it tending to confirm that these had been the precise words employed. Kissinger protested angrily at the leak, saying: "It's enough to drive you to drink. It's sort of disgusting to me." And five former leaders of the Sanhedrin wrote to *The New York Times* with a hilarious clarification, replete with Reagan-era euphemisms. They spoke of "Israel's alleged excesses" and asserted that Kissinger had not exactly called for a ban on the press:

He suggested that while that might have been desirable at the outset, it would be inadvisable now. We have no recollection that he advocated the use of brutality in putting down the riots; indeed, he was critical of excessive force, while strong-

ly advocating that the uprisings should be put down as promptly as possible.

Yeah, yeah. And shouldn't that be "alleged excessive force"? A perfect nondenial denial for our day, right down to "we have no recollection." I think we can take it that the words recorded by the loyalist Julius Berman were not invented but were the ones actually uttered.

So I suddenly thought, What about *Nightline*? Will ABC continue to use, as its "contributing analyst," a man who urges a ban on news coverage? I decided to ask what Kissinger's contract with the network said, what it was worth to him, and whether his stand on press freedom had aroused any qualms at the network.

I got nowhere on Kissinger's emolument, which is odd when you consider how ABC boasts about its salaries and expenditures. Ted Koppel, who did me the courtesy of returning my telephone call, correctly said that the Israelis were no worse than any other state in seeking to limit coverage that they saw as inimical to their "self-interest." Yet when I asked how he felt about Kissinger's recommendations, Koppel took refuge in "the context," claiming there was a dispute about what had occurred at the meeting. In point of fact, even Kissinger's apologists differ only about the timing he thought most appropriate for blacking out the Palestinian uprising. On this being pointed out, Koppel politely declined to comment any further.

Should I have been surprised? Perhaps not. Koppel has described his friendship with Kissinger, when the latter was Secretary of State, as something beautiful and formative: "It was somewhat akin to playing tennis with Boris Becker every day for a year and then going back to the club and playing everyone else." In 1975, Kissinger offered Koppel the post of State Department spokesman. Last June he said he would repeat the offer if the occasion ever arose, only this time, he said, "If I were to give him a job, it would be a substantive one—say, Assistant Secretary for Europe."

Does Koppel requite this friendship on the air? I would say yes. In a particularly glutinous moment on January 22 of last year, Koppel was introducing his favorite guest for an impartial discussion of hostage-taking and spoke thus:

Many of the world's leaders today studied foreign policy under Professor Henry Kissinger at Harvard. He knows the territory. He also knows that it is a mine field. Dr. Kissinger has stepped on a few of those mines himself, among them Vietnam and Chile.

Terrific. (I can't help noting that Kissinger's luminous opening comment on this occasion was, "You have to remember that at any one point, there are tens of thousands of Americans around.") In a world where Vietnam and Chile are things that happen to Henry Kissinger, we have gone straight through the looking glass to a place where murder is done casually and the doing of it is regarded as a credential. I should hasten to say that I do not deny Kissinger his right to exist. What I do deny is his right to negate the existence of others, and to have that presented as objectivity.

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